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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY

NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

JOINTNESS WRIT LARGE?  
PRESIDENTIAL DECISION DIRECTIVE 56  
MANAGING COMPLEX CONTINGENCY OPERATIONS

CORE COURSE 5505  
MILITARY STRATEGY AND OPERATIONS

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**America can always be relied upon to do the right thing...after exhausting all the available alternatives.**

**- Winston S. Churchill**

### ***Introduction.***

Following the Cold War, the U.S. has repeatedly engaged in complex contingency operations that have challenged decision-makers to delimit U.S. objectives in response to crises, apportion interagency roles and missions to achieve U.S. objectives, and coordinate effective identification and application of the tools needed to meet those objectives. If, as John Hillen postulates, "the essence of American statecraft in the post-Cold War world is discrimination about where, when, why and how to use American power"<sup>1</sup>, then Presidential Decision Directive 56 (PDD-56) provides a first cut in developing and institutionalizing a process to link policy, strategy, and execution in conducting complex contingency operations.

While the concepts of coordination, planning, responsibility and accountability, and lessons learned are second nature to military leaders, these concepts are, in large measure, alien to the culture of the civilian agencies. This paper argues that PDD-56 is a potential threshold shift in the way that the whole of the U.S. government structures and formulates its response to crises. If PDD-56 is implemented as envisioned, it may well form the basis for a revolution in civil-military affairs.

### ***Origins of PDD-56.***

The Clinton Administration's first attempt to deal with complex contingency operations resulted in PDD-25 (Reforming Multilateral Peacekeeping Operations), which emerged from the apparent failure of U.S. engagement in Somalia. In contrast with its

failure inspired predecessor, PDD-56 emerged from the apparent success of U.S. engagement in Haiti. PDD-56 is the product, born of frustration, by four key actors in Haiti's "Operation Uphold Democracy": Lieutenant General Wesley Clark of the Joint Staff, Dick Clark of the National Security Council Staff, Thomas McNamara of the State Department, and Ted Warner of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Despite outward success, they believed U.S. engagement in Haiti reflected a failure to adequately apply lessons learned and a persistence of the deficiencies that led to the debacle in Somalia. In their view, U.S. involvement in Haiti suffered from ad hoc and conflicting policy objectives, a lack of strategic clarity and planning, and an absence of discipline among the agencies of government to commit and coordinate the resources required for success. Moreover, they recognized that the Theater Commander in Chief, the United States Atlantic Command (USACOM), "stole the march" on Washington policy makers by planning for military intervention, both in the absence of and in anticipation of guidance from "inside the beltway".

Following Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti, a workshop initiated by The National Defense University concluded that

"Interagency policy differences in approaching the Haiti question contributed to planning confusion. Publicly, U.S. policy was to use diplomatic means to accomplish the departure of the Haitian military and the return of Aristide. Within the administration, the NSC favored the use of force, while DOD remained negative. USACOM began planning for a military contingency while DOD's civilian leadership remained in denial. major players continued to disagree on the goals until the final weeks prior to launching the mission Without appropriate resources, agencies could only contemplate what they would do. This process and security restrictions resulted in considerable frustration at the operational level where military planners found themselves preparing for civil-military operations without being able to talk to their civilian counterparts."<sup>2</sup>

Lieutenant General Clark led the effort to develop a Presidential Decision Directive to provide doctrine, planning procedures, and execution mechanisms for complex contingency operations. Lieutenant General Clark's vision of PDD-56 was to create a mechanism to promote American interests while preventing the military from taking on non-military tasks. The Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense/Strategy and Requirements spearheaded the development and drafting of PDD-56.

The original intent to provide clear and concise guidance for interagency coordination and integration in conducting complex contingency operations evolved, after nearly three years of review, comment, and changes, in a document reflecting bureaucratic politics among all of the agencies of government. Consequently, the final version of PDD-56, signed by President Clinton in May of 1997, was intentionally vague, eviscerated of doctrine, emphasized development of policy options over policy making, and did not supersede previous PDD's (such as PDD-25) in guiding an holistic approach to policymaking. Nonetheless, PDD-56 retained its core concept of the necessity for the agencies of government to plan, monitor, and assess U.S. participation in complex contingency operations using a standard, integrating framework to provide coherent and coordinated guidance and support to the field. Moreover, PDD-56 recognized that a key shortcoming in present U.S. involvement in complex contingency operations is the lack of expertise, particularly outside the Department of Defense, in planning and cooperation between and among the agencies of government.

While PDD-56 might appear to be no more than an exhortation to the agencies of government to "do better", three overarching themes offer the potential for PDD-56

to emerge as a seminal document in shaping the engagement of the U.S. in the post-Cold War world.

First, PDD-56 requires that, in response to a crisis, the Deputies Committee of the National Security Council will develop policy options for the National Command Authority via an Executive Committee that includes all relevant agencies of government, including those not normally part of the National Security Council structure. Thus, PDD-56 envisions a centralized and integrated approach to achieve agency-wide unity of effort in the formulation of coherent U.S. policy objectives.

Second, PDD-56 directs the development of a political-military implementation plan using a standard framework for analysis that links and coordinates ends, ways and means, provides measures of effectiveness, ensures continuous review to adapt the plan to changing circumstances, and requires a post-engagement study to ascertain lessons learned for the future. Significantly, the framework is not a checklist; rather, it is a non-linear model to coordinate U.S. policy, strategy and instruments in response to crisis.

Third, PDD-56 demands both responsibility and accountability by the agencies involved in complex contingency operations. That is, the members of the Executive Committee are charged with committing their agencies to take appropriate responsibility for their portion of an operation and with personal accountability for implementing their agency's area of responsibility within an operation.

Explicit in the mandate of PDD-56 is the concept that "success" in complex contingency operations requires that all aspects of a crisis--political, security,

humanitarian, economic, military, and cultural--be planned and managed, both in the near and the long term, in a coordinated, cumulative fashion

### ***Implementing PDD-56.***

Just as the Department of Defense took the lead in originating PDD-56, so too it has taken the lead in implementation of the mechanisms described in the PDD. Three core efforts are underway.

First, The National Defense University is conducting a series of training and gaming courses designed to develop a cadre of interagency expertise, at the Deputy Assistant Secretary level, capable of developing and implementing political-military plans in response to complex contingency operations. To date, three courses have been conducted and have revealed important lessons:

- Planning is an alien concept outside the Department of Defense. Training and gaming course directors discovered that planning at the strategic, operational and tactical level is non-existent in the current structural and operational culture of the civilian agencies of government. Thus, an initial expectation that PDD-56 training would be a matter of teaching coordination of planning has evolved into training on the concept of planning. Unsurprisingly, but significantly, planning is now being taught using proven Department of Defense models.

- Civilian government agency employees are generally unaware of their own assets. For example, Department of Justice (DOJ) students were unaware of the full range of capability that their department could bring to contribute to the police and law enforcement issues that are frequently critical to success in complex contingency

operations. Basic knowledge, found in Joint Publication 3-08 (Interagency Coordination During Joint Operations), regarding the role and capability of Justice Department divisions such as the Criminal Division's International Criminal Training and Assistance Program, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's overseas programs, and the United States Marshals Service Special Operations Group is lacking. Training and gaming revealed a tendency to hand over law enforcement to the military during crisis, not because Military Police were right for the task, but because DOJ employees were unaware that their own department had the assets capable and available of performing the mission.

- Civilian agencies are not well equipped, particularly in time of crisis, to convey Washington guidance to the field. Whereas the military has near real-time communications capability at all levels of command, civilian agencies rely upon "antiquated" systems that neither foster the transfer of guidance to the field nor transfer assessments from the field. The disparity in communications capability often means that, regardless of the content of the information, the information that is fastest in reaching decision- makers in Washington and implementers in the field becomes the basis for action.

Second, the National Defense University has taken the lead in developing both an Interagency Complex Contingency Operations (ICCO) Handbook and a complementary Planning Decision Support System (PDSS). Both of these materials are a hybridization of the Joint Staff Officer's Guide and Joint Publication 5-03.1 (Crisis Action Planning), adapted for use in the interagency environment. While the concepts



enumerated in the ICCO Handbook and the PDSS are second nature to (and thus often ignored by) military planners, they are truly revolutionary within the interagency environment. The PDSS, in particular, is unique to the interagency process. It is a software program enabling simultaneous analysis and planning, using the PDD-56 framework, to identify and match ends, ways, and means in response to a crisis.

Third, the Director for Strategic Plans and Policy (J-5) of the Joint Staff is developing a PPD-56 inspired mechanism to link the decision process in Washington to the execution process in the field. This link, the Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST), is essentially a deployable Executive Committee. The MAST, composed of Washington interagency representatives, would deploy to conduct on scene situation assessment and analysis. Subsequently, the MAST would return to Washington to assist in policy and strategy development and coordination. Finally the MAST would return to the scene as a task force, responsible to the operational commander, to assist in integrating implementation between Washington and the field.

### ***Implications of PDD-56.***

Although PDD-56 has yet to be invoked and tested in a real world contingency, its mechanisms and its implementation have significant implications for the future of civil-military affairs. The prizes and pitfalls of PDD-56 stem, in large measure, from application of proven military concepts to the interagency environment.

#### Prizes.

Centralizing both policy and strategy implementation within the National Security Council has the potential to ensure unified guidance and integrated effort by all

agencies of government in complex contingency operations. The Executive Committee, as the principal coordinating body of the National Security Council, thus parallels a joint staff.

The migration of proven military planning models to the civilian agencies of government has the potential to overcome the historic difficulties that plague the interagency process, particularly in times of crisis. The political-military implementation plan imposes the rigor and discipline required such that U.S. engagement in a complex contingency operation is effective, integrated, and executable.

Imposing accountability and responsibility upon interagency representatives to the Executive Committee has the potential to force the civilian agencies of government to both enumerate the tools available to contribute to the overall effort in complex contingency operations and to articulate the resources required for such operations.

#### Pitfalls

Centralizing the development and implementation of both policy and strategy within the National Security Council in response to complex contingency operations runs the risk of creating a de facto "General Staff", beyond the reach of Goldwater-Nichols, because the centralized planning and execution of complex contingencies takes place outside the Department of Defense. Developing a cadre of complex contingency operations specialists may result in the unintended consequence of breeding a class of "Executive Committee Experts" capable of taking control of both the process and the substance in complex contingencies. PDD-56's laudable goal of providing rigor and clarity in U.S. involvement in complex contingency operations must be balanced to

avoid plans that become ends in themselves and planners that develop policies without oversight. Further, the strategic efficiency envisioned in PDD-56 must avoid the temptation to dictate not only the what, but the how to the field.

Command and control of complex contingency operations may default to the military, although the operation is not essentially military in nature. PDD-56 envisions a lead agency be designated for complex contingency operations. Care must be taken to avoid the automatic assignment of the military as lead agency solely on the basis of its capability to process and disseminate information and guidance to the field. The concept of supported and supporting elements in the interagency process, not addressed in PDD-56, must be established.

For the military, implementing PDD-56 could have the unintended result of increasing, rather than decreasing its engagement in non-military tasks. Integration of military and civilian agency efforts in responding to complex contingency operations must not be conflated with incorporation of civilian agencies as another branch of the military. This distinction is critical to maintaining a co-equal and conterminous relationship between civilian and military participants in complex contingency operations, particularly as operations transition from their initial, predominantly military phase to their later, predominantly civil phase.

### ***Conclusion.***

Although PDD-56 remains untested in a real world crisis, the integrated planning processes and standard format to develop a political-military implementation plan, derived from joint military models, "provide a reasonably complete framework to help

national leaders consider all relevant aspects of a proposed strategic engagement."<sup>3</sup> Institutionalizing these mechanisms to integrate the disparate military and civilian agencies of the U.S. government in response to crisis can improve the process of deciding whether to intervene and increase the likelihood of a successful intervention. Significantly, the military provided both the genesis for initiating and the expertise to institutionalize PDD-56. In a global environment in which the boundaries between civil and military action are increasingly intertwined, the joint concepts and planning tools crafted by the military over the last fifty years offer a basis for true unity of effort in coordinating all elements of U.S. power to respond to crisis.

It is not a foregone conclusion that the formal, rigorous planning and applications of lessons learned will take hold in the civilian agencies of government. Similarly, joint planning and habitual self-examination do not, in themselves, guarantee success. However, should the training and education of interagency representatives, now serving at the Deputy Assistant Secretary level, continue beyond the Clinton Administration, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century may give rise to "comprehensive jointness", not only in complex contingency operations, but throughout the government.

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1 John Hillen, *The U.S. Role in Global Security*, National Defense University Institute for National Strategic Studies, Strategic Forum Number 134, February 1998, page 4

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Daly Hayes and Gary F. Wheatley, *Interagency and Political-Military Dimensions of Peace Operations: Haiti-A Case Study*, National Defense University: Institute for National Strategic Studies, Center for Advanced Concepts and Technology, 1996, pp 29-50

<sup>3</sup> Edward J. Filiberti, *National Strategic Guidance: Do we need a standard format?*, Parameters, Autumn 1995, page 53

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